

Board Members at Odds Over Committee

By PAULA MAXWELL

Boosting affordable housing while reducing "build out" density is one of many challenges facing a new zoning by-law study committee. Just who will make up that committee was the topic of much discussion Monday night.

At a land-use board work session held at town hall, 25 board and committee members discussed implementation of the town's new Comprehensive Plan. Newly elected Selectmen Chairman Margaret Kearney, led the discussion seeking each board's goals and objectives to identify commonality and disagreement.

Participants included members of the Board of Selectmen, Planning Board, Zoning Board of Appeals, Board of Health, Conservation Commission, Design Review Board and other town officials.

A committee will sift through the Plan's recommendations to develop specific proposals and language for bylaw changes and will be assisted by a \$30,000 stipend approved in Article 38 by voters at town meeting in 1999 for consultant assistance. Any changes to the zoning bylaw would require a two-thirds vote of town meeting.

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Until Monday night, planning board members assumed they would play the major role in making recommendations. That scenario is contained in the plan's executive implementation summary. The planning board spent the past six years developing the new Comprehensive Plan.

A proposal by Selectmen Andre Martecchini to instead create a "broad-based" committee to draft proposed changes drew strong criticism from Planning Board Vice-Chairman Will Zachmann. He called Martecchini's suggestion an "ambush" saying the planning board would be more effective in doing the job with committee input. Zachmann said his board had already set aside meeting time in their schedule for the next year to develop specific proposals.

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Under Martecchini's proposal, the appointed "broad-based" committee would use the \$30,000 instead of the planning board. Specifically, Martecchini proposed membership which would include two members of the planning board, two members of the zoning board of appeals, one member each of the conservation commission, board of health, design review board, and the board of selectmen, and four or five citizens at large with support from the inspectional services director, health agent, town planner and conservation administrator.

Martecchini said he felt it important that not just the planning board membership be involved in drafting the specific language of any changes to the zoning bylaw.

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Some members of the planning board said they would agree to this type of committee as long as the membership was firmly committed to the goals set forth in the approved comprehensive plan, but not everyone involved in the discussion was ready to commit to that requirement.

Conservation Commission Chairman Mark Mahoney endorsed Martecchini's suggestion as a plan with "diverse stakeholder representation".

ZBA Chairman Tom Tucker also supported the idea, emphasizing that the ZBA would like to be involved because they are the body which will be involved in interpreting and enforcing the bylaws. He said there are a number of areas that need to be more clearly defined and be rewritten citing among them, insufficient clarity on such areas as accessory apartments and bedroom count.

ZBA member Jim Lampert observed that language in the bylaws must be precise and understandable by the way it is applied and for those who have to work with it. He also noted that you can't adjust zoning bylaws to force someone to change an existing structure.

ZBA member Sally Wilson, a former chairman of the Planning Board, said that the 1973 study committee for the comprehensive plan was made up of a broad based 13-member group who were effective and able to get the bylaw change recommendations through town meeting.

Design Review Board Chairman Jean Clark noted that key citizens at large have historically been very effective in playing key roles on important committees of the past such as the town manager study committee.

Kearney suggested that any committee formed might meet regularly with the planning board for update and discussion.

When it became clear that Martecchini's suggestion had the support of each board present, Zachmann suggested that the planning board and selectmen jointly vote for those committee members who would be named as citizens at large and work up a charge for the committee.

Kearney said that the discussion would be taken up at the next meeting when the particulars of membership would be further defined. The group did not rule out the possibility of the town moderator appointing the committee.

The Comprehensive Plan makes recommendations and sets goals involving land use, economic base, natural and cultural resources, housing, public facilities and services, and transportation.

Though most of Monday night's discussion involved the make up of the committee that will facilitate the zoning bylaw change recommendations, the meeting also involved presen-

tation of each board's respective goals.

Among the possible recommendations set forth by various land use committee members of

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those attending were: putting more "teeth" into the recommendations of advisory boards including the planning board and design review boards; address "mansionization" issues; preserve and advocate affordable housing diversity; address concerns for implications of changing regulations of mounded septic systems; reestablish water resource and wet-

land boundaries; take another look at establishing historic districts; review commercial design standards; review non conforming lot issues.

Martecchini stressed that most important to the board of selectmen was preserving a mix of housing and creating affordable opportunities so that those who want to live here don't have to spend \$600,000 to do so in the future.

Planning Board member George Wadsworth cited the need to find common ground with competing land use goals set forth in the plan such as reducing density and creating more open space while creating affordable opportunities.

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